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The color of versatility



"Pegasus," painting by Mike Mazer of Massachusetts, one of the works in the watercolor show that opens this weekend. Image courtesy of the artist

"Watercolor is the oldest coloring medium made by man," said Nancy Stewart, exhibition chair for the Taos National Exhibition of American Watercolor XIV. This year marks the 14th year that the local organization hosts the national exhibition. A total of 26 artists from around the United States will exhibit their work in the national juried section of the show. An additional regional exhibit will display works by Taos watercolorists who are also members of the society.

The show opens with a reception Saturday (Aug. 14) from 5-7 p.m. at the Millicent Rogers Museum, 1504 Millicent Rogers Road, in El Prado.

Many of the artists from other states are coming in for the reception.

According to Stewart, the earliest cave and rock paintings were a form of watercolor, which consists of any pigment soluble in water combined with a binding agent. Today the medium includes transparent watercolor as well as gouache, acrylic, tempura and others. The exhibition highlights the versatility of watercolor.

While all of the artists used a watercolor medium, there is a wide range of techniques and styles demonstrated. The show includes representational work that is so realistic you might mistake it for a photograph and abstract art that plays with geometric forms, color and light.

"It's a really high quality show over all," said Teresa Ebie who was the juror for the national section of the exhibit. With more than 25 years of experience as an art historian, educator and museum curator, Ebie knows good art when she sees it. She has held positions as the curator of Southwestern art and director of the Taos Summer Art Program for the Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame, and as chief curator at the El Paso Museum of Art. Ebie co-authored the book and exhibition, titled "Taos Artists and their Patrons, 1898-1950" published by University of Notre Dame in 1999.

The juried national exhibition is invitational only. All invited artists are signature national members of the Taos National Society of Watercolorists, which means they have been juried into at least three previous Taos shows. Many are also members of other prestigious painting associations, such as Watercolor USA Honor Society, the American Watercolor Society, the National Watercolor Society, and the Salmagundi Club, and their work is sought out for museum, corporate and private collections.

Each invited artist submitted two digital images. Ebie reviewed the images and selected one piece, or in some cases both of the submitted works. Once the original art arrived in Taos, Ebie took another look at the work, and made her selection for the six award winners.

"I was looking for the images that were the most innovative, the most unusual," said Ebie, who selected Don Harvie's piece "Bus Stop" for Best of Show.

"I really liked that painting because it was so unusual. It was not a typical image and the perspective was unusual and all of it worked together really well. I found that really appealing. That one stood out for me."

"Bus Stop" depicts a white-haired woman with a cane and shopping bag waiting by a bus stop sign. The point of view looks down onto the scene from above, which emphasizes the woman's stance and posture. She wears a long blue coat. The perspective, and her slightly tousled hair, hides her face from view. Her hands clasp strongly around a cane and her feet are set apart. Her slightly bent posture gives the viewer the impression she is determined not to give way to the weight of her shopping bag. The stop sign towers above her.

The second place Award for Excellence was given to Mike Mazer of Mattapoisett, Mass., for "Pegasus," a close-up view of a boat in a harbor.

"It's quite a realistic watercolor but it captures the water effect so it exploits the watercolor very well," said Ebie. "The boat is white and light-colored so it really stands out. He used the negative space in the watercolor really well, which is difficult to do."

Third place went to David Milton of Laguna Beach, Calif., for "Santa Fe," his realistic portrayal of a Route 66 neon sign. The piece is part of a series that Milton painted of old Route 66 signs, depicting a slice of Americana in the unlikely medium of watercolor.

Andrea Vincent of Chicago, Ill. won "Award for Quality" for her piece called "Native Pots." The piece was also chosen for the cover of the exhibit's catalog and postcard invitation.

Eleven Taos artists who are members of the Taos National Society of Watercolorists will also show their work in a regional artist section of the exhibit. Each of these artists has been juried into the Society on the basis of the professional quality of their work. As members, they must also help with local shows and projects, including hanging the current exhibit under the direction of Stewart. The Taos artists are Kristi Benson, Angie Coleman, Robert Cooley, Ken Daggett, Joan Fullerton, Salvatore Giglio, Linda Grams Henderson, Lori Malott, Jane E. Scott, Nancy Lee Stewart and Pat Woodall.

The show continues through Sept. 29.

Since 1992, the Taos National Society of Watercolorists has worked to promote professional quality watercolor on the local and national levels by producing art exhibits. The nonprofit also holds additional activities including traveling shows, studio tours, workshops and demonstrations.

A demonstration of watercolor techniques by prominent Taos artist, Joan Fullerton is planned Aug. 28, 1-4 p.m., at the Millicent Rogers Museum. Fullerton is a dynamic college and national workshops instructor with an international exhibition record. Fullerton's demonstration is free with museum admittance. Guided tours of the exhibit may be arranged by contacting the museum at (575) 758-2462.

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